GROWING
Raphia farinifera
IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

GROWING CONDITIONS IN THE BECK GARDEN FOR *Raphia farinifera*	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Sand over a layer of hardpan (pineland flatwood habitat)
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week - prefers wet conditions
Fertilization	4 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Full sun or partial shade
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None
Insect Damage	None observed
Cold Hardiness	No damage observed
Hurricane Resistance	Excellent

Raphia farinifera is a monoecious palm native to Africa and Madagascar. It is not threatened in the wild. In habitat, it typically is found in swamps or rainforests at elevations up to 2,600 feet. Its stems may be solitary or clumping. The leaves are erect and form an upright shuttlecock appearance. In the tropics, the leaves can grow to 70 feet long including a 20 foot long orange petiole. Even the leaflets can grow eight feet long. The stems max out at 30 feet tall and two feet in diameter. These measurements are of palms growing in habitat. In South Florida, this palm's size is much more manageable. Being monocarpic, the stem dies after flowering. The inflorescence can grow 10 feet long and produce large, brown fruit covered with overlapping scales. Flowering in habitat occurs in 20 to 25 years. Fruit can take five to six years to mature.

The palm pictured on the cover is at Dale Holton's nursery in Loxahatchee. It is planted in a non-irrigated area close to a large pond. As the pond level rises in the rainy season, this palm can be submerged in water. It receives no fertilizer. This palm was purchased in a 25 gallon pot. The palm rooted into the ground through the container and required a bobcat loader to move. This was a large palm when planted. It only took six years for it to start blooming. The 2009 record cold winter damaged the leaves and most likely shocked it into bloom. Another specimen was planted in Dale's cyprus swamp and it survived the record cold 2009-2010 winters. The palm planted by the pond has a 12 to 15 foot tall stem with leaves 15 feet long. The infructescence measures six to seven feet long.

We have a single 17 year old *Raphia farinifera* planted in our garden. It has clumped two stems which measure three and five feet tall and two feet in diameter. The fronds measure 30 feet long. This palm is on the fringe of our irrigation system so it receives less supplemental irrigation than the rest of the garden. Our specimen came through the record cold 2009-2010 winters without any damage. It also was not damaged by the 2004-2005 hurricanes.

This palm has impressive fronds. Our specimen would probably have longer fronds if planted in a wet area. Just imagine a palm with stems which will likely never grow more than 15 feet tall but grow 30 to 40 foot leaves with orange petioles. And this palm does not take up much space due to its upright growth pattern. Even if a hurricane topples this palm, it wouldn't cause much damage due to its short stem. Other palms with fronds this long are *Arenga pinnata* and *Attalea* species. *Arenga pinnata* grows 60 feet tall and is the first palm to topple in a hurricane. Most *Attalea* species will also grow 60 feet tall and could cause quite a bit of damage if fallen due to a hurricane. Another advantage of *R. farinifera* is that old fronds are easy to reach for removal. This palm can attract a lot of attention due to its unique

appearance and its rarity in home site plantings. Let's hope Dale's seeds mature so there will be a ready supply of this beautiful palm.

Close up of cover photo showing 6 to 7 foot long inflorescences.
(Photo by Dale Holton)

Raphia farinifera fruit at Dale Holton's nursery.
(Photo by Dale Holton)

Raphia farinifera with 30 foot long leaves in the Beck garden.
(Photo by Charlie Beck)

***Raphia farinifera* growing at Dale Holton's nursery in Loxahatchee.**
(Photos by Dale Holton)

Double stem of *Raphia farinifera* growing in the Beck garden.
(Photo by Charlie Beck)